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Public School Forum Releases Top 10 Education Issues for 2017

Adequate Public School Funding and Boosting Teacher Pay Among Top Issues

RALEIGH, NC (January 25, 2017) – The Public School Forum today released its Top 10 Education Issues for 2017 during its 3rd Annual Eggs & Issues Breakfast in Raleigh. QuintilesIMS was the presenting sponsor for this year's event. Forum President and Executive Director Keith Poston and James E. Ford, the Forum's Program Director and former NC Teacher of the Year, presented the annual list to more than 225 business, education and government leaders. The full publication can be downloaded at <https://www.ncforum.org/>.

"Our Top 10 revisits some familiar themes from previous years including teacher pay and per pupil spending, two areas where our state ranks near the bottom nationally," Poston said. "New issues for 2017 include changes in education leadership brought on in part by the 2016 election, as well as a larger focus on principal pay and preparation."

In its Top 10 Education Issues publication, the Forum noted that North Carolina's average principal pay ranks 50 out of 51 states and the District of Columbia. The average principal salary has decreased 10 percent since 2008-2009.

The Public School Forum urged state leaders to focus on adequacy of funding for the state's public schools:

"The new wave of state leadership comes at a time of great tension over the future of public education in North Carolina," Poston said. "A recovering economy offers the opportunity for the state to substantially increase its investment in public education, yet some leaders continue to call for increased funding of alternatives to public schools such as private school vouchers."

The Public School Forum noted that North Carolina ranked 44th in the country in per-pupil spending in 2015-16, up from 47th in 2014-15. North Carolina spends 8.3% less per student than it did before the recession. That's a bigger drop than all but nine other states.

"Any changes to funding systems should take into consideration the adequacy of the resources so that we meet the state's obligation guaranteed to every child of a sound basic education," Poston said.

Teacher salaries have risen in North Carolina the last two years. However, NC's average teacher salary still ranks 41st nationally, up from 42nd in 2014-15. In 2000-2001 we were 21st and as late as 2008-2009 we were 25th nationally. On a regional basis, all states bordering North Carolina have higher average teacher salaries than North Carolina. 52 percent of NC teachers have a 2nd job, the 3rd highest rate in the country.

"We need to make teaching in North Carolina great again," Poston said. "North Carolina needs a sustained investment in teacher pay as well as more autonomy – and funding – for school systems to design and implement new roles with higher salaries for teachers who want to take on new roles but stay in the classroom."

The Public School Forum also calls for the creation of a new teacher scholarship program to replace the NC Teaching Fellows Program that was eliminated by the NC General Assembly in 2011. The NC Teaching Fellows Program was a national model that placed 500 top North Carolinians into our public school classrooms each year. More than 5,000 NC Teaching Fellows are in the state's classrooms today in all 100 NC counties.

"Enrollment in our UNC system schools of education, our state's single largest source of teachers, is down 30 percent since 2010," Poston said. "A new scholarship program for aspiring young teachers would certainly help reverse this trend."

The Public School Forum addressed the need for greater accountability in school choice alternatives like public charters and voucher-funded private schools:

"Every school receiving public funds should be held accountable to a set of rigorous, objective measures of how well they serve their students," Poston said. "The state must address gaps in accountability and transparency between district-run public schools and public charters."

"North Carolina has a long and well-deserved reputation as a national leader in investing in education, whether it's early childhood education, our state's community colleges and universities or our k-12 public school system," Poston said. "We hope 2017 will be an opportunity for education to take the lead once again."

Public School Forum of North Carolina's Top 10 Education Issues for 2017

1. Exercise Strong Education Leadership for North Carolina's Children
2. Fund North Carolina's Public Schools Fairly and Adequately
3. Make Teaching in North Carolina Great Again
4. Improve Access, Equity, and Accountability in School Choice
5. Overhaul Principal Pay and Invest in Preparing the Next Generation of School Leaders
6. Maintain a Strong Focus on Race in Public Education
7. Improve Grade-Level Reading through Comprehensive Investments in Early Childhood

8. Enable the Transition to Personalized, Digital-Age Learning Models
9. Create Meaningful and Streamlined Assessments
10. Increase Support for the State's Struggling Schools

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About the Public School Forum of North Carolina

Since 1986, the Public School Forum of North Carolina has been an indispensable and nonpartisan champion of better schools and the most trusted source in the state for research and analysis on vital education issues. We bring together leaders from business, education and government to study education issues, develop ideas, seek consensus, and ultimately inform and shape education policy. We do that through research, policy work, innovative programs, advocacy, and continuing education for educators and policymakers. Follow us on Twitter [@theNCForum](https://twitter.com/theNCForum) and visit our website at <http://www.ncforum.org/>